

A Comparative Study On The Learning Styles Of Second Year Education (Living Skills) Students And The Teaching Styles Of Their Lecturers

Noor Mala Ibrahim & Nor Hidayah Binti Ramli
Faculty Of Educational
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

Abstract: Learners' learning styles are the most important factors in determining how well they learn second language. The success however is very much dependent not only on learner's learning style but also teacher's teaching style. However there has always been a mismatch between learners' learning styles and teacher's teaching style and therefore language learners do not learn effectively. This research was set out to investigate on the issue and to reveal the learning styles of University Technology Malaysia second year students from Faculty of Education who are majoring in Living Skills as well as the social and surrounding factors that influence their language learning styles and preferences. This study also investigated on the students' view on their lecturer's teaching style and consequently the problems that they encountered during the implementation of Advanced English for Academic Communication (UHB 2422) class due to the mismatch of their learning styles and lecturer's teaching style. A number of 50 UTM students who are majoring in Education (Living Skills) became the respondents and the research instrument used was questionnaire. This research found out that the most preferred learning styles of the students is kinesthetic style while the major factor that influence their learning style is their course and major of study. Most of their lecturers are perceived as having visual teaching style. Out of 50 students, only 6 students have their learning styles matched with their lecturers' teaching styles. The main problem encountered by the students is they felt drowsy during the class. This study recommended teacher or language instructor to vary their teaching style and match their teaching styles with their learners' learning styles in order to ensure an effective teaching and learning.

Abstrak: Stail pembelajaran pelajar adalah merupakan faktor paling penting dalam menentukan keberkesanan pembelajaran bahasa kedua. Kejayaan mereka walaupun bagaimanapun bergantung tidak sepenuhnya hanya kepada stail pembelajaran pelajar tetapi juga stail pengajaran guru. Walaupun bagaimanapun, ketidaksepadanan diantara stail pembelajaran pelajar dan stail pengajaran guru sentiasa berlaku dan oleh sebab ini pelajar-pelajar bahasa kedua tidak belajar dengan berkesan. Kajian ini bertujuan telah dijalankan untuk menyiasat tentang isu ini dan untuk mendedahkan stail-stail pembelajaran pelajar-pelajar tahun dua Universiti Teknologi Malaysia yang mengambil major dalam jurusan Kemahiran Hidup dan juga turut mengkaji tentang faktor sosial dan persekitaran yang mempengaruhi stail pembelajaran mereka. Kajian ini juga turut mengkaji tentang persepsi mereka terhadap stail pengajaran pensyarah mereka dan secara tak langsung turut mengkaji masalah-masalah yang dihadapi oleh para pelajar sewaktu perjalanan kelas Advanced English for Academic Communication (UHB 2422) sehubungan dengan ketidaksepadanan yang berlaku diantara stail pembelajaran pelajar dan stail pengajaran pensyarah mereka. Seramai 50 orang pelajar-pelajar UTM yang mengambil major dalam bidang Kemahiran Hidup telah menjadi responden dan alat kajian yang telah digunakan ialah borang soal selidik. Kajian ini mendapati bahawa stail pembelajaran yang paling diminati oleh pelajar-pelajar tersebut ialah stail kinestetik manakala faktor utama yang mempengaruhi stail pembelajaran mereka ialah faktor jurusan dan bidang pelajaran yang diambil. Kebanyakan daripada pensyarah mereka dianggap mempunyai stail pengajaran visual. Daripada sejumlah 50 orang pelajar, hanya 6 orang sahaja yang didapati mempunyai kesepadanan diantara stail pembelajaran mereka dan stail pengajaran pensyarah mereka. Manakala masalah utama yang dihadapi oleh pelajar-pelajar tersebut ialah mereka selalu menghadapi masalah mengantuk di dalam kelas. Kajian ini telah mencadangkan agar para guru atau pengajar bahasa supaya mempelbagaikan stail pengajaran dan menyepadankan stail pengajaran

mereka dengan stail pembelajaran para pelajar untuk memastikan pengajaran dan pembelajaran yang berkesan.

Keywords: learning styles, teaching style

Introduction

Learners' learning styles are one of the most important factors in determining how well they learn second language. Learning style is defined as the unique collection of individual skills and preferences that affect the students' way of perceiving, gathering, and processing information in their learning processes. The term learning style is used to encompass four aspects of the person: cognitive style such as preferred or habitual patterns of mental functioning; patterns of attitudes and interests that affect what an individual will pay most attention to in a learning situation; a tendency to seek situations well-matched with one's own learning patterns; and a tendency to use certain learning strategies and avoid others (Lawrence, 1984). Knowing self-learning preferences will also help students to plan their learning especially language learning such as, in choosing the appropriate activities and techniques as well as the approach to their learning in order to make their learning more meaningful and effective. Furthermore, learning style will also affect how students act in a group, participate in classroom activities, relate to others, solve problems, and as well as learn the language.

Apart from the studies conducted on language learning styles, factors influencing learners' learning styles and preferences and learners' view on their lecturer's teaching style, there is also a growing need to determine the most common problems occur due to the mismatched between learners' learning styles and teacher's teaching style.

Statement of Problem

Second language teachers as well as learners do not seem to realise the importance of taking into consideration learners' learning styles and preferences factors in designing and planning for the approaches and learning activities to be conducted in the classroom. This has resulted in the students feeling demotivated to learn since the learning approaches do not match with their preferences. This is because teaching and learning process plays an important role in determining the learners' understanding and their motivation to learn the subject. This is supported by the research conducted by Hodges (1982) to a group of secondary ESL students where it has demonstrated that approximately 90% of traditional classroom instruction is geared to the auditory learner. Teachers talk to their students, ask questions, and discuss facts. However, only 20% to 30% of any large group could remember 75% of what was presented through discussion. This situation has resulted in the mismatched of the teacher's teaching styles with the learners' learning styles and preferences which have caused difficulties for them to understand what they are learning. To solve this problem, some learning style theorists suggest matching teachers' and students' styles. In this way, students will be exposed to the teaching styles that are consistent with their learning styles (Barbe, Swassing, & Milone, 1979; Dunn, 1984; Dunn & Dunn, 1979; Dunn, & Price, 1978; Hunt, 1979). Another researcher, G.Gonzalez (1977) urges teachers in bilingual classrooms to identify individual variables and determine various approaches to achieve interaction because if the mismatch problems continues to exist between learning styles of most students in a class and the teaching style of the teacher, they may lead to more serious problems such as the students will get discouraged about the courses, the curriculum, and themselves, do poorly in tests and examination and in some cases they change to other curricula or drop out of school.

Based on the research, it is clearly seen that this mismatched may effect negatively to the students especially on their learning process as well as their attitude in learning English. As a result from this problem, they will perform poorly in the subject. This situation somehow can be claim as one of the main

reason of poor achievement in academic performance for English subject and yet, the teachers still do not take any attempt to improve their teaching approaches and techniques by taking into consideration the students' learning styles factor in their lesson planning. Teachers do not realise that this is one of the major factors of their teaching failure in which may then lead to more serious problems in the future.

Given the situation, it is the time for teachers as well as learners to put an effort in studying about the possible problems and implications of the mismatch to the teaching and learning process. There is a very important need to carry out a study on these problems and for the teachers to investigate this issue in order to ensure that the teaching and learning process is conducted effectively and benefits both the teacher and the learners.

Objective of the Study

The objectives of this study are :

1. to identify the language learning styles of UTM second year undergraduates of Faculty of Education who are majoring in Living Skills.
2. to investigate the factors that influence the language learning styles of this students in learning English.
3. to investigate the students' view on their English lecturer's teaching style.
4. to investigate on the problems faced by these students in UHB 2422 class based on their learning styles and teaching styles of their lecturer.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study may help in raising awareness among UTM second year undergraduates of Faculty of Education who are majoring in Living Skills on the implications of the mismatched that exist between their learning styles and teaching style of their language instructor towards their learning and performance of English subject. The findings also help ESL teachers and practitioners to be aware of the importance of taking into consideration the learners' learning style factors when planning for the activities and approaches to be conducted in the ESL classroom. Moreover, UTM second year undergraduates of Faculty of Education can identify their types of learning styles and preferences based on the criteria of every style discussed in this study. This study will also help UTM second year Living Skills undergraduates of Faculty of Education and other ESL learners and teachers to be aware of the problems that may occur due to the mismatched between learners language learning styles and their teachers' teaching style where it may result to many serious problems related to the students motivation and behavior which can be considered as the main reason of the poor performance in English subject. The problems occur when the learners' learning styles do not match with the teaching and learning approaches or techniques employed by the language instructor. ESL teachers can also use the findings and information gathered through this study as a reference and guideline in order to improve their teaching approaches and techniques in promoting better understanding of lessons conducted.

Scope of the Study

This study on language learning styles involved the participation of 50 UTM's second year undergraduates of Faculty of Education. The respondents were the second year Faculty of Education students majoring in Living Skills who are currently taking Advanced English for Academic Communication (UHB2422) which is an English course offered by the university. The questionnaires was distributed to the respondents within the scope of study in all places in UTM including the Faculty of Education.

Methodology

Research Instruments

This research utilised quantitative research methodology in collecting data. The instrument used in collecting data was questionnaire.

Questionnaire

A set of questionnaire containing 15 questions was developed based on the questionnaire designed by Solomon & Felder (2002), and Jester (2002). Different question-types, such as category questions, listing/choice questions, likert-scale questions, and open-ended questions were used in the questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised of seven different sections ; i) respondents' particular, ii) respondents' preferred learning style, iii) factors influencing language learning style, iv) student's view on lecturer's teaching style, and v) problems encountered by students during the implementation of UHB 2422 class. The last section is an open-ended section on student's perception towards their lecturer's teaching style and the problems that they encounter during the class. To ensure its reliability, the questionnaire was piloted on five second year UTM undergraduates of Faculty of Education who are majoring in Living Skills. After the analysis on the pilot study was done, the questionnaires was revised and distributed to 70 respondents from the targeted group.

Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study were the second year UTM undergraduates of Faculty of Education majoring in Living Skills. A total of 70 questionnaires was distributed to the sample who are currently taking Advanced English for Academic Communication (UHB 2422) offered by UTM during their undergraduate study and 50 questionnaires were returned. The questionnaire was distributed during their second semester while they are taking the UHB 2422 subject. Out of the 50 respondents, 17 of them are male students while the rest are female students. Four of them were found to have good English qualifications where they scored 1A for they SPM English 1119 and Band 4 for their MUET. Two students scored 2A while the rest about 3 students scored 3B, 6 students scored 4B while the rest that is another 24 students have an average English qualifications where they have credited their SPM English with 5C and 6C and an average of Band 3 and 2 for their MUET. However there are also students which is about 11 students who have a very poor performance in their SPM English as well as in MUET. These students scored 7E and 8E in their SPM English and Band 1 for their MUET.

Result and Discussion

Identification of Students' Learning Style

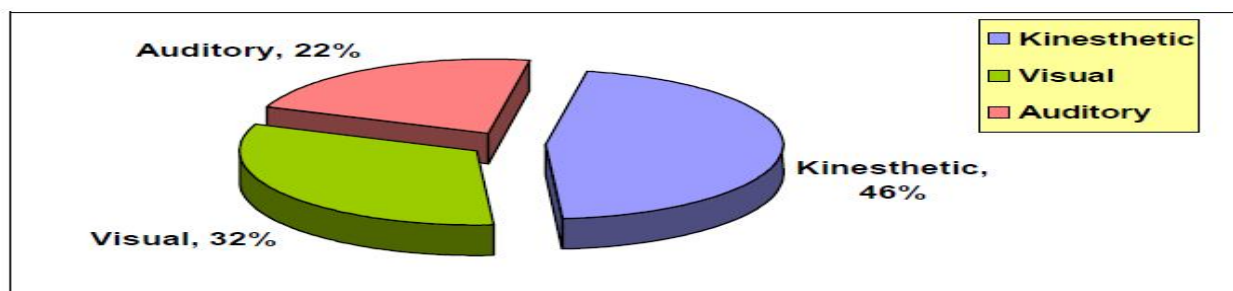


Figure 1: Learning styles of second year students of Faculty of Education majoring in Living Skills.

Based on the data presented in the tables above as well as a further analysis of the students' and their choice of statements, it was found out that the most preferred learning styles among the respondents is the kinesthetic style. A majority of 23 out of the 50 respondents or 64% chose four of the six statement thus making them fall into the kinesthetic style. The second most preferred learning styles of the students is visual learning style with 32%. It was found out that out of 50 students, 16 of them fell into visual learning styles after choosing four or more of the statements in the category. The auditory learning styles however was found to be the least preferred learning style where only 22% of the respondents or 11 out of 50 respondents fell in the category. The possible reasons for the kinesthetic learning style was found to be the most preferred learning styles than the other two styles is probably because the respondents are majoring in technical course that is Living Skills which requires a lot of 'hands-on' learning as they learn various types of technical subjects such as electrical, machinery, welding, technical drawing, sewing, as well as culinary. The practices that they have to do could be one of the reasons that influenced them to become kinesthetic learners. In other words, because they are used to learn through kinesthetic mode of learning which is through 'doing' and lab activities, it had somehow affected their preferences in learning.

Based on the findings above, it can be summarized that the most preferred learning style of the respondents is the kinesthetic style. This finding is similar to the findings of a study conducted by Nafisah @ Kamariah Md Kamaruddin and Nurhaiza Abd Wahab in 2002 on form four electrical engineering students in three technical schools in Malaysia. They have found that 70 or about 56% of the technical students are kinesthetic learners due to their major field of study which requires them to involve with many physical activities and movements through the practical work and laboratory activities that they have to do. This has somehow influenced their learning styles and preferences.

In short, the dominance of the kinesthetic style of learning among the technical students in this study can be explained by the nature of the practical and "hands-on" nature of their programme of study.

A Comparison between Learners' Learning Styles and Teaching Styles of their Lecturers.

From the findings above, it was found out that out of 50 respondents, only 6 of the respondents have their learning styles matched with their lecturers teaching style. Two of them are visual learners that matched with visual lecturers. One auditory learner with an auditory lecturer and another two students are the kinesthetic learners who matched with kinesthetic lecturers. This can be seen in the table presented below:

Table 1: The match in Learners' Learning Styles and Teachers' Teaching Styles

Learning Style vs. Teaching Style	Number of Students
Visual vs. Visual	2
Auditory vs. Auditory	1
Kinesthetic vs. Kinesthetic	3

The rest of the respondents that is another 44 students have their learning styles mismatched with their lecturers' teaching styles. The result is presented in the table below :

Table 2: Mismatched of Learners' Learning Styles and Teachers' Teaching Styles

Learning Style vs. Teaching Style	Number of Students
Visual vs. Auditory	9
Visual vs. Kinesthetic	5
Auditory vs. Visual	7
Auditory vs. Kinesthetic	3
Kinesthetic vs. Visual	7
Kinesthetic vs. Auditory	13

Out of 44 students who are having a mismatch with their learning styles and teaching styles of their lecturer, 9 of them are visual learners that mismatched with auditory lecturers. As for visual learners who are having a mismatch with kinesthetic lecturers, there are 5 students who fell into this category. Another 7 auditory students are having a mismatch with visual lecturers. Three auditory learners faced a mismatch with kinesthetic lecturers and as for another kinesthetic learners, 7 of them are mismatched with visual teacher. Last but not least, the most mismatched occurs between 13 kinesthetic learners with auditory teachers.

Conclusion

Based on the purpose of the study conducted, the following conclusions can be drawn from the study:

The most preferred learning style of the students is kinesthetic style. This could be influenced from the course of study that they followed since they are required to learn mostly through kinesthetic modes of learning or 'hands-on' type of learning. The second preferred learning style is visual style while the least preferred learning style is the auditory style.

The results from the findings indicated that mismatch that occurred between the learners' learning styles and their perceived teachers' teaching styles may result negatively to the learners' learning process. However, this study may only be valid for the second year UTM students majoring in Education (Living Skills) only.

References

- Bandler, R & Grinder, J. (1987). *The Neurolinguistic Programming*. Retrieved July 18, 2007, from : http://www.teachingenglish.org/Think/methodology/learning_style.shtml.
- Barbe, W.B., Swassing, R.H., & Milone, M.N. (1979). *Teaching through Modality Strengths: Concepts and Practices*. Columbus, Ohio: Zaner-Bloser.
- Brown, H. (1994). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. Eaglewood Cliffs. N.J : Prentice Hall Regents.
- Cassidy, S., Eachus, P. (2000), Learning style, academic belief systems, self-report student proficiency and academic achievement in higher education, *Educational Psychology*, 20(3), 307-22.

- Curry, L (1990). *A Critique of Research on Learning Style*. Educational Leadership, 50–56.
- Diaz, D.P., Cartnal, R.B. (1999), Students' learning styles in two classes. *College Teaching*, 47(4), 130-6.
- Domino, G. (1979). Interactive effects of achievement orientation and teaching style on academic achievement. *ACT Research Report*, 39, 1-9.
- Dowdall, R. J. (1991). Learning style and the distant learner. *Consortium project extending the concept and practice of classroom based research report*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 348 117).
- Dunn, R. (1983). Learning style and its relation to exceptionality at both ends of the spectrum. *Exceptional Children*, 49, 496-506.
- Dunn, R. (1984). Learning style: State of the scene. *Theory Into Practice*, 23, 10-19.
- Dunn, R. & Dunn, K. (1972). *Practical approaches to individualizing instruction*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ : Prentice-Hall .
- Dunn, R., Dunn, K. & Price, G.E. (1975). *The learning style inventory*. Lawrence, KS : Price Systems.
- Dunn, R., Dunn, K. & Price, G.E. (1978). *Teaching students through their individual learning styles*. Reston, VA: Reston Publishing.
- Dunn, R., Dunn, K. & Price, G.E. (1979). *The productivity environmental preference survey*. Lawrence, KS: Price Systems.
- Ellis, R. (1985). Twelfth impression 1999. *Understanding second language acquisition*. Oxford : Oxford University Press.
- Ehrman, M. & Oxford, R. (1989). Effects of sex differences, career choice, psychological type on adults' language learning strategies. *Modern Language Journal*, 73, 1-13.
- Ehrman, M. & Oxford, R. (1988). *Ants and grasshoppers, badgers and butterflies: Qualitative and quantitative exploration of adult language learning styles and strategies*. Paper presented at the Symposium on Research Perspectives on Adult Language Learning and Acquisition, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.
- Erichson, G. (1989). *Developing a Strategy for Study*. Retrieved July 18, 2007, from [http: www.iteslj.org/GuidetoSpanishLanguage.html.org/index.html](http://www.iteslj.org/GuidetoSpanishLanguage.html.org/index.html).
- Fleming, N. (2006). *VARK Frequently Ask Questions*. Retrieved July 16, 2007, from [http: www.VARK.org/index.html](http://www.VARK.org/index.html).